

Teach Your Kids About Hunger During March Nutrition Month

SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Arlington County, the sixth wealthiest county in the nation, has nearly 20,000 people living below the federal poverty level of \$25,100 for a family of four. The number of children eligible for free or reduced price lunches ranges from 0.56 percent or 3 students at Tuckahoe, 19 students or 3.07 percent at Jamestown Elementary, to 514 students or 80.56 percent at Carlyn Springs Elementary.

Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) distributes over 80,000 pounds of food to more than 2,400 needy families each week in Arlington, and at the beginning of the pandemic the number of households jumped 23 percent. Forty percent of the food donated to AFAC is from food drives and grocery store donations with a little over half of this from grocery stores.

Charlie Meng, Chief Executive Officer of AFAC says, "Food drives are vitally important to the work of AFAC." But he points out that as grocery stores have better matched supply and demand, donations from stores have been dropping. He says in the next year they will be encouraging more food drives.

March is Nutrition Month and where there is an idea, there is a way, big or small. Food drives take a variety of forms from neighborhood and church groups to libraries and local businesses and school groups.

Children have played a big role in these efforts. Eagle Scout Charlie Gaylord and Boy Scout Troop 106 built a permanent Little Free Pantry in back of the Central Library to collect AFAC donations.

The Keenan family in 2020 set up tables in their front yard with a goal of collecting 10,000 cans and offered treats for those who stopped by with a contribution. Neighborhoods were dotted with food drives advertised on NextDoor and sponsored by various high school organizations.

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology students have organized a mini Construction where each team creates a sculpture out of cans and non-perishable items. In October 2021, they donated 3,474 pounds of food to AFAC. Two elementary school students organized a food



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
Jamestown Elementary students assemble baking kits at Valentine's Day for AFAC families.

Elementary made Valentine's packages with cooking oil, flour, sugar and other baking needs. Every year Scouts fan out in the national Scouting for Food effort around neighborhoods to collect bags of cans left outside doors in the biggest AFAC volunteer effort of the year.

Your child can organize family, their Sunday School class, friends, soccer team or neighbors around a food drive. Or they can reorient their next birthday party to expand or replace the traditional birthday gift they receive with a can of tuna or soup for someone else.

Or they can organize a cereal drive in the winter with their friends and build a wall of cereal boxes in their living room. Maybe they would rather make emergency food kits including specified items for a day including breakfast, lunch and dinner and put them in a decorated bag with a handwritten note. One group collected baking supplies in a festive bag around the holidays.

The kids can have an organizational and planning party (with pizza of course) where they make the yard signs, an outline of things to do, create a social media message, design flyers with a

list of most needed items including canned tuna, canned soups, canned vegetables and tomatoes, peanut butter in plastic jars and low-sugar cereal.

They can go grocery shopping with you while scanning labels for no salt added, no sugar added, low sodium, unsweetened for their own contribution to the food drive. They might want to imagine they are feeding their own family and choose things from the accepted list that they would like to eat.

While it is easy to plan a food drive, it does take some organizational skills which can be a bonus as your child learns to set the date for the food drive and register it online, order the food collection box from AFAC, advertise the drive and return the food to AFAC. More details can be found on the AFAC website.

If your child isn't quite ready to jump into a food drive yet, it's easy to just pick up a can or box when shopping with mom or dad and drop it in one of the many AFAC boxes scattered around the community outside some grocery stores, churches and businesses who maintain a permanent collection site. They may want to spend part of their allowance each week on a can of soup or container of cooking oil. For a list of these sites check fooddrives@afac.org



PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Items on the most requested AFAC list include tuna, low sodium canned vegetables, low sugar cereal, peanut butter and cooking oil.

collection on their street, nearly filling an AFAC box.

Just this month students at Jamestown



FILE PHOTO

Annual Scouting for Food Drive around local neighborhoods provides the biggest contribution of canned goods and non-perishable food items all year.



Families line up at AFAC headquarters on S. Nelson Street for free supplemental groceries.



Charles Meng, CEO of Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) in front of new warehouse.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

How to Help Hungry People as Costs Rise

Arlington Food Security Task Force: “The need persists.”

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
THE CONNECTION

Lurking beneath the Arlington that ranks as one of the most preeminent places to live in the nation are the nearly 8 percent of households experiencing food insecurity. Arlington County just released a new report, “Improving Food Security and Access in Arlington, Virginia.”

The report, prepared by the Arlington Food Security’s Task Force of 28 stakeholders in partnership with the Urban Institute, found that Arlington County had many resources available for residents to meet their food needs, but the residents reported cost pressures in purchasing food and balancing household finances and bills. The

report found 7.8 percent of Arlington households were experiencing food insecurity in 2019.

The study is part of the Food Security Task Force’s strategic plan, which is expected to be released in the fall. The Arlington County Department of Human Services and the Arlington Food Assistance Center funded the report. The Committee has been meeting for the past 12 months to gather information, produce a needs assessment and come up with a strategic plan.

The report looked at geography of food distribution sites, hours of

and many organizations and individuals doing great work to close the gap, but the need persists.”

The report found that there was substantial variability on food insecurity ranging from 2 percent to 15 percent of households in different parts of the County with the concentration in south and east Arlington County. The areas most affected include Glencarlyn, Buckingham/Ashton Heights, Pentagon City, Crystal City south, Forest Glen/Arlington Mill and Crystal City North neighborhoods.

In general, twenty percent of food insecure survey respondents said they could rarely afford food they found nutritious and healthy,

and fifteen percent said they could rarely find food that was culturally appropriate. The report found that Asian households with low incomes living in the Crystal City neighborhood had low access to charitable food and had to travel further to access charitable sites. This area of high-rise apartments had not been a primary target of food access interventions.

Stephanie Hopkins, Food Assis-

Report: “There are many organizations and individuals doing great work to close the gap, but the need persists.”

Food insecurity ranges from 2 percent to 15 percent of households in different parts of Arlington.

availability, transportation and accessibility of healthy and culturally

appropriate foods as well as experience of residents. It stated “There



Volunteers pack vegetables contributed by local gardeners for low-income food programs.

tance Coordinator at the Department of Human Services, coordinated the report. She said this finding about Crystal City was the biggest surprise in the report for her. “I have to be honest. We had to do outreach and dig into the concentration.” She said she thinks in this high-income area of Crystal City it may be more difficult for the food insecure families to come forward. “Stigma and pride may be a barrier, that they shouldn’t have to take charity.”

Sally Diaz-Wells, Social Justice and Outreach Ministry at Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, says the level of need in Crystal City also surprised her as well as the need for charitable services to be open nights and weekends when people can access them.

The report found that there are over 50 charitable food distribution sites in Arlington. Although most are open year round, fewer than 1 in 5 offered weekly service

SEE HOW TO HELP, PAGE 4

How to Help Hungry People as Costs Rise

FROM PAGE 3

or evening and weekend hours. Our Lady Queen of Peace operates a weekly food distribution that grew from 500 families a week to 700 last year.

Diaz-Wells says one of the most valuable parts for her of serving on the Committee was the information sharing. “Having contact with who is getting what, listening to the problems everyone has. It helps me adjust what OLQP does.” She explains, “We started



Sally Diaz-Wells, Our Lady Queen of Peace Social Justice and Outreach Ministry.

buying more soy sauce. And Latino cultures don’t all like the same kind of dried beans so we offer choices.” Diaz-Wells said there used to be 80 percent Latinos but not anymore. There are Afghans and “I have seen more Asians in the last six months. When schools don’t have enough coverage for Easter week, we will have more.”

Robin Broder, Friends of Urban Agriculture and also a Committee member says, “It’s a little early to say how Friends of Urban Agriculture would fit in but I think that we need to think creatively to meet the needs of our residents who are food insecure. I think our demonstration garden Project HUG could be a model duplicated at other sites to help meet the needs of specific communities and grow culturally specific produce. Plot Against Hunger could partner with AFAC to provide produce for a mobile pantry as well.”

Charles Meng, CEO of AFAC, said nothing in the report surprised him. “This is the world I deal with. But there are 28 people on

the committee and a number of them aren’t as familiar with the situation.” In addition, he thinks this finding is overblown. “A lot of these people in Crystal City are already coming to AFAC and the report is using data from 2019 before the pandemic.” He says that actually AFAC is already serving a higher percent of families in Crystal City than in other parts of the County.

The report also found that food insecurity is part of a bigger issue that resulted in difficulty paying expenses and with families having no backup to buffer in case of an emergency. Food budgets were often the first

to be cut as the families faced the challenge of balancing food and rent and utilities.

The report looked at the households’ access to SNAP, and charitable groceries or meals. They found that most residents had access to a SNAP retailer. They prioritized cost of groceries in deciding where to shop but encountered obstacles in finding healthy or culturally appropriate food; some struggled with trans-

portation. Diaz-Wells said that many of the people who come to their site at Our Lady Queen of Peace carpool with their cousins or neighbors or walk, and some ride bikes.

Meng says, “All of a sudden food insecurity is about transportation. But it’s really about why people can’t find food.” He says it’s a more structural issue, a symptom of something else — low wages, lack of affordable housing, high prices.”

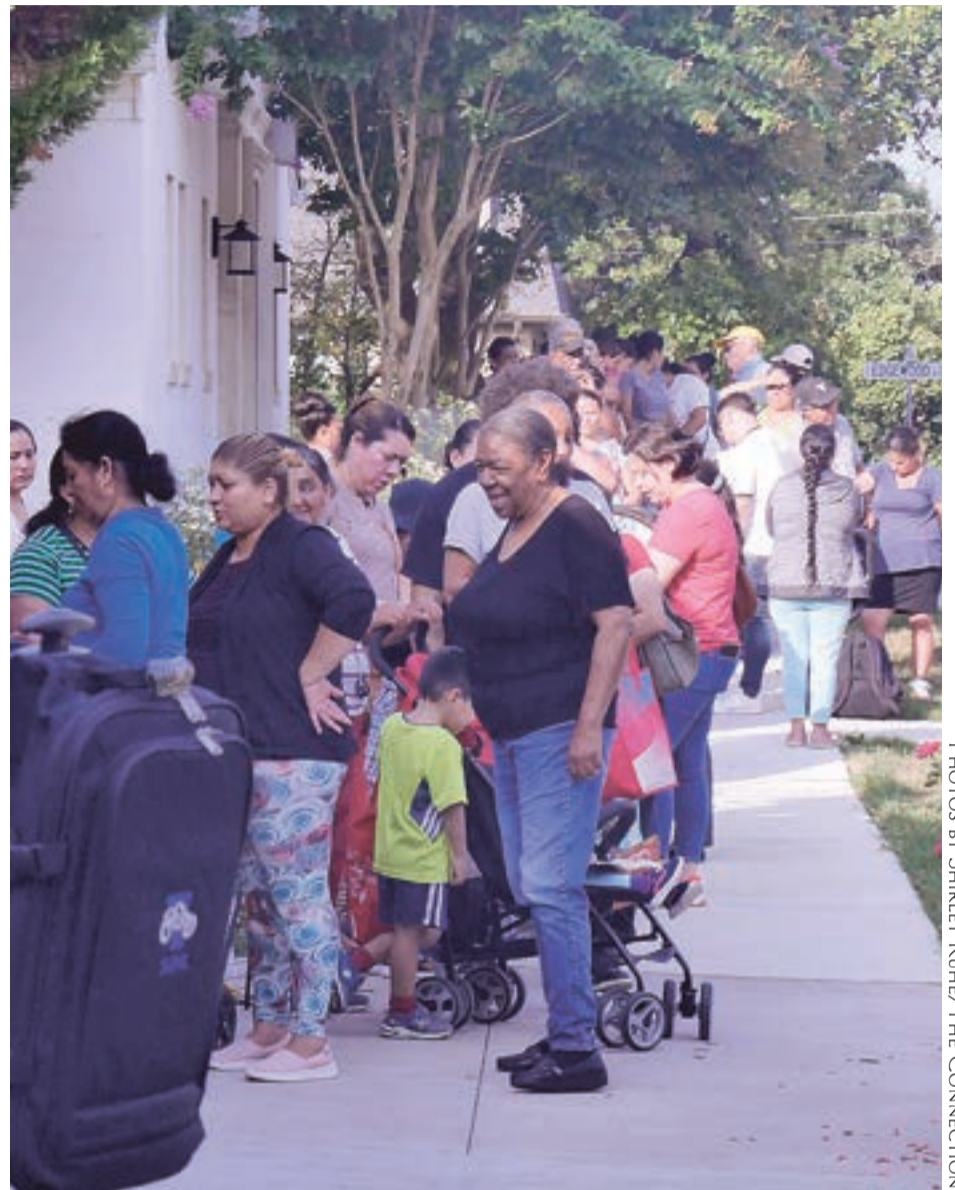
Meng says, “We did a food insecurity report seven or eight years ago. We needed a new one.” AFAC and the Urban Institute funded the recent report. He said that Matt de Ferranti was the County Board chair at the time they funded this recent report and interested in this issue. “In fact, he is the only Board member who has been interested.” De Ferranti, who is currently the Board

liaison to the Task Force, adds this is one of his top priorities and when COVID kicked in. “We needed to step up to keep people fed and prevent evictions.”

The report indicates that AFAC provided 57% of the total amount provided by food pantries and meals with schools providing 4 percent, Capital Area food bank 9 percent, senior 6 percent and other non-profits 9 percent. Meng said these numbers aren’t entirely accurate because they include double counting. For instance, someone may be coming to AFAC but

also getting food from the Capital Area food bank or another local distribution site.

Meng, sitting with a thick notebook of AFAC statistics on his desk, says, “I had really hoped we would get this kind of information from this report. But most of the sites don’t collect data in a way that is usable. They don’t collect addresses that would allow cross referencing.”



The line outside Our Lady Queen of Peace for their weekly food distribution.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUIHE/THE CONNECTION

What comes next?

The report recommendations cover transportation, food delivery and accessibility as well as communication and it would necessitate a number of different players to make them happen.

Meng says five or six of the recommendations involved AFAC, “and we have already addressed them midstream. We have expanded AFAC hours again to add evening hours.” He adds there is a new site at Arlington Mills Community Center, one of the areas identified in the report, and they are looking at another site at the West end of Columbia Pike. “We do offer culturally appropriate foods like halal meats and masa and a rotation of bean varieties,” and he pointed out, “We do it with our own dollars.”

“The AFAC budget is \$8 million a year and the county contributes only \$555,000.” Meng says that the establishment of AFAC as a supplemental provider of groceries for Arlington residents is extremely different the funding mechanisms used by most counties funding mechanisms. He explains two committed individuals and six congregations in 1988 founded the non-profit and “it wasn’t until 2005 that the County decided to give us a minor amount.”

Meng says the other recommendations are directed at the County and “my question

to them is do they have the funds or desire to make changes. I can decide what AFAC will do. I will make the appropriate changes at AFAC but I asked the County what they plan to do.”

Hopkins says the recommendations are scheduled to come out in the fall. The next step will be to set up focus groups in the summer and to ask the community what they think and then adjust the recommendations based on feedback. The recommendations will be based on what’s realistic, what makes sense.

Hopkins says the strategies proposed in the plan will build on the report’s recommendations, including implementing a coordinated SNAP outreach plan and making charitable food resources and government food assistance programs more accessible to residents. “Implementation of those strategies will be shared between Arlington County, AFAC, APS and other organizations and will be directed by Arlington’s Food Security Coordinator.”

Hopkins says some of the Urban Institute recommendations are not as realistic for Arlington. There are a lot of recommendations and it won’t all happen at once. Hopkins says, “We’ve got to be realistic. Every inch we get closer to helping, that’s great. Every little piece helps.”

The report found that Asian households with low incomes living in the Crystal City neighborhood had to travel further to access charitable sites.

Food insecurity is part of difficulty paying expenses. Food budgets were often the first to be cut.

Frozen Hands Cart Home Frozen Turkeys at AFAC Turkey Week

You can help with near record need for food assistance.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

It's a cold first day of Turkey Week at Arlington Food Assistance Center on South Nelson Street. Clients line up along the sidewalk on Monday, Nov. 14 with their large empty bags with kids hopping on the sidewalk to stay warm in the 40 degree temperature.

A Sysco truck full of 3,000 turkeys that arrived on Friday is parked along the street. Volunteers had started unloading the turkeys earlier on Monday morning to stack their table as the last stop for the families in need who have come to pick up holiday food. A bin sits on the end of the table filling up with yellow tickets good for "one pavo."

Volunteers from the National Association of Chain Drug Stores are manning the turkey table and assisting in the food line. "They are one of our best corporate supporters," Jolie Smith, AFAC Director of Development says. "They support as with money, donations, and volunteers—all the three that help."

Charles Meng, Executive Director of AFAC says that currently 2,516 families are receiving AFAC supplemental food each week, "close to the peak of the pandemic — just 150 short of the record number."

Smith says their turkeys used to cost \$25,000 but this year cost \$60,000 due to inflation. "And we ordered them this summer when prices were cheaper. Food prices are so much higher, and it's scary right now, no one can make ends meet. They have to come here. One third of the people we serve are children."

Volunteers wheel large cardboard AFAC boxes across the parking lot to the warehouse. The boxes are filled with donations from the annual Scouting for Food drive that was held over the weekend. Smith says they expect to get about 40,000 pounds of food from the scouting drive.

She points to large bins of beans in the warehouse that have already been sorted.

"First we sort the cans and then we look at the expiration dates and

SEE FROZEN HANDS, PAGE 4
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



Jolie Smith, AFAC Director of Development and Raymond Bynum, warehouse lead, inspect two of the 3,000 frozen turkeys on Monday, Nov. 14.



Dave Fitzsimmons (left) and Mike Ayotte from the National Association of Chain Drug Stores hand out bags each containing a 10-12 pound frozen turkey and four COVID test kits.



Volunteers wheel heavy boxes of food to the AFAC warehouse which is overflowing with donations from the annual Scouting for Food campaign.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



A line forms outside the AFAC headquarters where families in need are waiting to pick up their free groceries for the holidays.



A bin fills up with yellow "one pavo" tickets deposited in exchange for a 10-12 pound turkey at the AFAC food distribution on Nov. 14.

Be Part of 2022 Children's and Teens' Connection

One week of December for many years, this newspaper has devoted its pages to the creativity of local students, teens and children. The results are always remarkable. It is a keepsake edition for many families. Even readers without children of that age spend time admiring and chuckling over the issue. The annual Children's Connection, including Children's Gazette and Children's Almanac, is a long-time tradition.

You can see last year's editions by visiting <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/> and scrolling down to Children's Edition.

We welcome contributions from public and private schools, art classes, individuals and home-schoolers. We publish artwork, poetry, essays, creative writing, opinion pieces, short stories, photography, photos of sculpture, gardens and any other creative efforts.

We ask that all submissions be digital so they can be sent through email. Writing should be submitted in text format: docx or google docs, or pasted in the body of an email. Artwork should be photographed or scanned and provided in jpeg format. These can be submitted via google drive as well. Please share all google drive files with kimm.mary@gmail.com



DECEMBER 15-21, 2021

ONLINE AT WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Some suggestions, but different ideas are welcome:

- ❖ Drawings or paintings or photographs of your family, friends,

pets or some favorite activity. These should be photographed or scanned and submitted in jpeg format. Photos of sculpture or larger

art projects are also welcome.

- ❖ Short answers: What is one thing that you would change about school? What do you want to be when you grow up? What is your favorite animal? What is your favorite possession? What makes a good friend? What is the best gift you've ever received?

- ❖ Your opinion (100 words) about movies, food, music, sports, restaurants, video games, toys, trends, politics, etc.

- ❖ Poetry, short story or other creative writing.

- ❖ News stories or photos from school newspapers.

We must be able to print the full first and last name of the student artist/writer with the submission, along with student's age, grade and school or town name.

Identify each piece of writing or art, including the student's full name, age, grade and town of residence, plus the name of the school, name of teacher and town of school location. Home schoolers' contributions are welcomed.

Please send all submissions by Monday, Dec. 5, 2022. The Children's Connection/Gazette will publish the middle of December, the edition with publication date Dec. 14, 2022.

Email submissions for the Children's Connection to kimm.mary@gmail.com

Make Wishes Come True at Doorways

Doorways is seeking people to fulfill their client families' wish lists to make this holiday season brighter. Winter Wishes sponsors can give clients the holiday they deserve. Grant wishes. Spread joy. Remind them that they have community support.

This year, as the weather starts to change and this season's chill sets in, Doorways is asking donors to provide new winter coats, at or around \$50 in value, to our clients along with a \$100 Target or Visa gift card.

Donors provide not only warmth but joy to the families in Doorways programs.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at astewart@doorwaysva.org

Give the Gift of Choice

Empower your neighbors at Doorways by donating a gift card today! While Doorways is able to connect parents with in-kind donations of diapers, pack-and-plays and other necessities, gift cards give them the flexibility to fill in the gaps themselves, plus the satisfaction of being able to shop and provide for their family.

Target and VISA gift cards can be mailed to:

Doorways
Attn: Development
P.O. Box 100185
Arlington, VA 22210

To coordinate a gift card drop off, please contact us <https://www.doorwaysva.org/contact-us/#development>

Stock the Shelves for the Holidays

Our emergency shelters are the center of our supportive services. From our bedrooms to our playrooms, each area of our shelters plays such an important role each day for our families. You can help our clients' temporary home

feel as homey as possible this season by replenishing much-needed supplies for our Freddie Mac Foundation Family Home, Domestic Violence Safehouse, and Safe Apartments.

Shopping Doorways' Amazon Wish Lists is a quick and easy way to help during the holidays and all year long. Purchase any of our urgently needed items through Amazon to have them shipped directly to Doorways for fast and hassle-free delivery.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/31PXPXL06TB-JR/ref=cm_wl_rlist_go_v?

Frozen Hands Cart Home Frozen Turkeys at AFAC Turkey Week

FROM PAGE 3

take out those that have expired." She explains it is important to treat people with dignity with the food that is offered.

Smith says at holiday time they receive large donations from the local grocery stores including ready made pies and also plenty of cans of pumpkin if people want to make their own pies. "We tend to buy root vegetables to give

our clients choices of all different types they might want at holiday time." She said that in addition to the basics which are always on the AFAC request list like tuna, canned beans and tomatoes, cooking oil, and peanut butter, they also suggest that at this time of the year donations can include basic baking supplies, "so people can make their special cake or cookies."

Smith says she is concerned

that donations are down. "I'm counting every little bit. Usually we get 25-30 percent of our donations in December. I hope we make our number. I started worrying about it in July. I think people making the donations are feeling the impact of inflation, too."

Support for AFAC takes a number of different paths. You can distribute, drive, glean or grow. People pledge money or offer

food contributions, and AFAC has over 2,000 volunteers a year. The volunteers provide 50,000 hours a year which allows \$1.5 million in reduced staff costs. In addition, local soccer teams or neighborhood groups sponsor food drives and corporations support major events each year such as the annual Golf tournament. For further information visit the website at: afac.org

The
Arlington
Connection

www.ConnectionNewspapers.com

Twitter @ArlConnection

An independent, locally owned weekly newspaper delivered to homes and businesses.

**Published by
Local Media Connection LLC**

**1606 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314**

Free digital edition delivered to your email box. Go to connectionnewspapers.com/subscribe

**NEWS DEPARTMENT:
arlington@connectionnewspapers.com**

Mary Kimm

Editor and Publisher

mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

Shirley Ruhe

Contributing Photographer and Writer

slrbc@aol.com

Eden Brown

Contributing Writer

arlington@connectionnewspapers.com

ADVERTISING:

For advertising information

sales@connectionnewspapers.com
703-778-9431

Debbie Funk

Display Advertising/National Sales
703-778-9444
debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com

David Griffin

Marketing Assistant

703-778-9431
dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com

**Classified & Employment
Advertising**
703-778-9431

Editor & Publisher

Mary Kimm

mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com
[@MaryKimm](https://www.facebook.com/MaryKimm)

Publisher

Jerry Vernon

703-549-0004
jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com

Art/Design:

Laurence Foong

Production Manager:

Geovani Flores

CIRCULATION

circulation@connectionnewspapers.com



Too Much Zucchini? Share with the Needy

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Extra zucchini, cabbage, beans? As of July 5th, gardeners around Arlington have donated 1,400 pounds of fresh produce to the Friends of Urban Agriculture (FOUA) program's bagging/collection site at Rock Spring United Church of Christ (UCC).

Each week the tally has climbed from the site's opening in mid-May where radishes, lettuce, turnips, beets and carrots were dropped off for bagging by volunteers and delivery to local church pantries. Now produce is more often zucchini, kale, onions, potatoes and cucumbers and even some horseradish.

Dianne Vandivier drops off her most recent supply of kale from her small side plot on July 11. "I'm overrun with kale. My son and I started this as a volunteer project last year. We grew food to donate to the pantries and worked in a FOUA Plot Against Hunger community garden, and with a new license my son delivered to the pantries. He's going off to college so now it's just me."

Any amount of produce is welcome and gratefully received by the food pantry clients. They suggest anyone leaving on vacation can pick what they have and drop it off before they go. Gardeners all across Arlington including businesses, churches, schools, individuals and community-based plots provide vegetables for the FOUA effort to help needy neighbors. FOUA also requests you bring along any extra paper bags which are used to transport produce to food pantries.

The Rock Spring site is open Mondays from 1-3 pm for gardener drop off as well as volunteer bagging of the produce. Volunteers may create a volunteer profile and sign up at arlingtonurbanag.org. Produce is delivered the same day to Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Arlington Assembly of God and Glebe Elementary School.

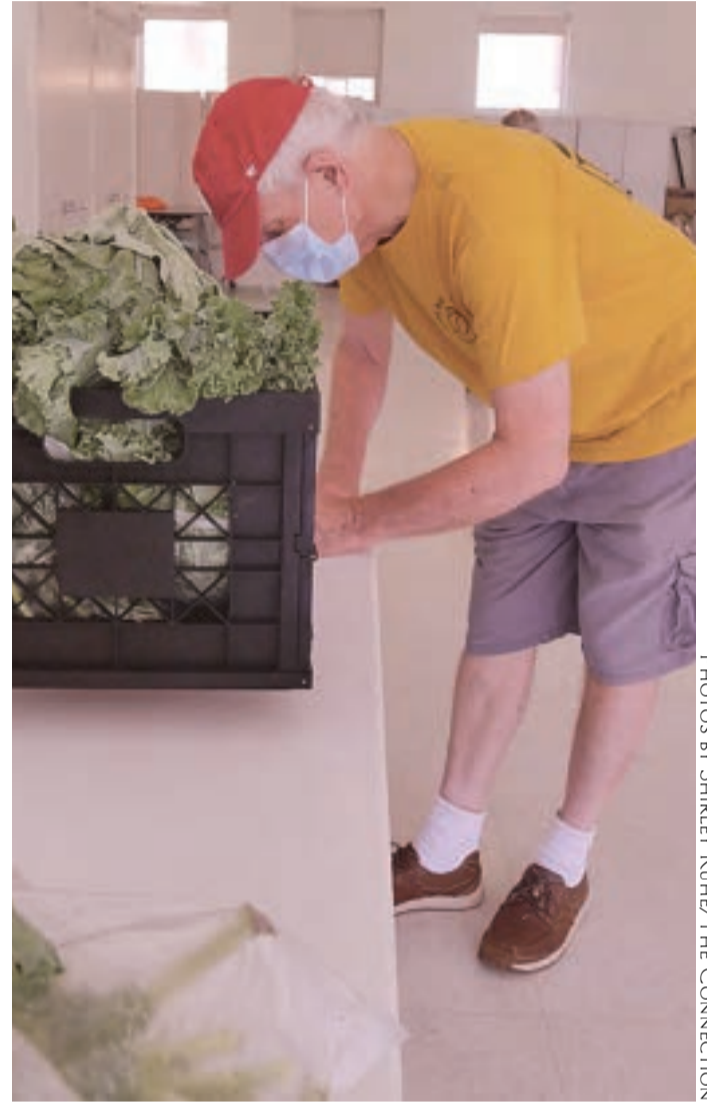
The Rock Spring site will also be open from 1-3 p.m. on Thursdays from August-October. Additional pantries will also receive produce during the summer as the number of vegetable donations increases. If you are unable to deliver the produce on Monday, check the website for other food pantries accepting produce on other days of the week.

In addition, gleaning trips to local farms to pick surplus harvest for the food pantries will begin toward the end of July, usually on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. See arlingtonurbanag.org for information and details about how to sign up.

FOUA adds that it's not too late to plant crops for harvesting in the fall. This includes the same crops that traditionally grow in the spring such as lettuce, beans, broccoli, carrots. The Produce Bagging Center is located at Rock Spring UCC on 5010 Little Falls Road.



Dianne Vandivier drops off a supply of kale from her small side garden plot on July 11. Sometimes she also volunteers as a bagger on Mondays.



Jay Fellows is the volunteer supervisor for the bagging on July 11. He says this is his third year working with this program. He weighs each contribution of vegetables before assigning it to one of the six tables of volunteers.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



Sandy Newton (left) and Kathy McGarril are putting zucchini and cabbages in large plastic bags to serve a family of four. McGarril says, "These zucchini are large. One of them should serve a family of four." Newton adds, "and one cabbage for four."



Rock Spring UCC is the drop off site for garden produce Mondays 1-3 p.m. for the Friends of Urban Agriculture Plot Against Hunger program.